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1 November 1971

MEMORANDUM

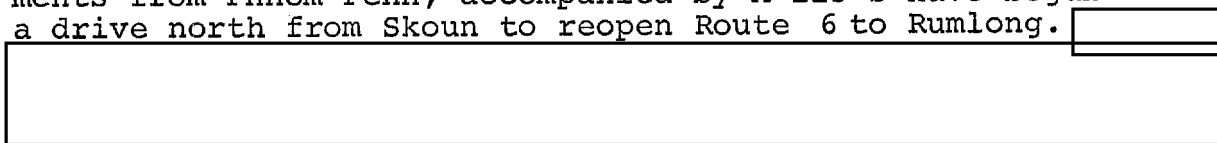
SUBJECT: The Situation on Route 6

1. The Communists' current offensive against the Chenla II task force was kicked off with a series of coordinated ground and mortar attacks on the night of 26 October. Much of the initial action centered on Cambodian positions near the village of Rumlong, which lies about 20 miles north of the Route 6/7 road junction at Skoun. Tactical reporting from the field has been running 24 to 48 hours behind the event; the latest report from the US Defense Attaché indicates that as of 1700 local on 31 October a total of seven Cambodian battalions were still encircled or under pressure in the area between Rumlong and Prakham. One additional battalion was forced to withdraw on 30 October as a result of an enemy gas attack that incapacitated 100 of its men. Another FANK battalion had been dispersed in the fighting last week.

2. All of the besieged battalions are running critically short of supplies. South Vietnamese helicopters attempting to resupply Cambodian troops in the vicinity of Rumlong were driven off by intense enemy ground fire on 30 October, but some supplies evidently have been successfully airdropped. Phnom Penh's efforts to send supplies and reinforcements overland via Route 6 have been complicated by the extensive damage the Communists caused on 27 October to a key bridge on the highway, some 12 miles south of Skoun. Four battalions of reinforcements from Phnom Penh, accompanied by M-113's have begun a drive north from Skoun to reopen Route 6 to Rumlong.

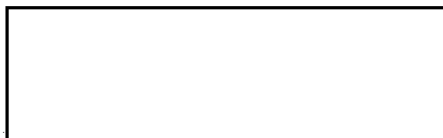
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DIA review(s)
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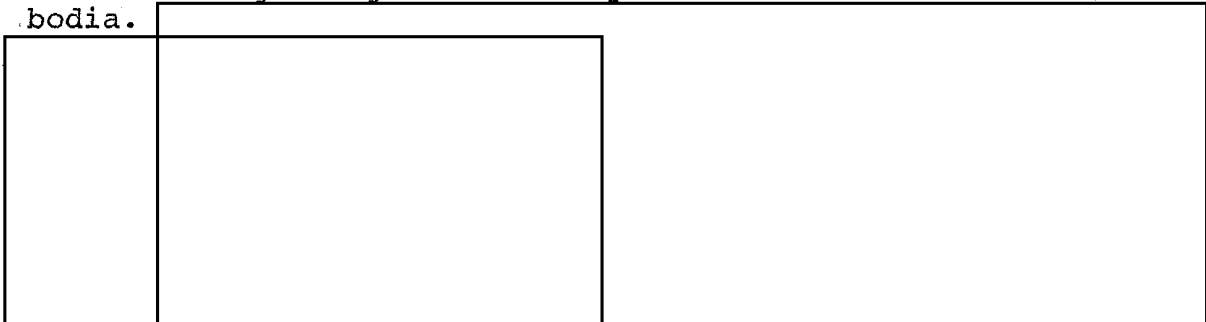


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3. There is evidence, however, that the Communists have also committed more of their own crack troops to the fighting on Route 6--suggesting that the campaign represents the beginning of their dry season offensive in Cambodia.

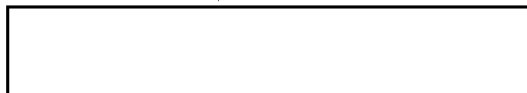
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4. On the government side, the Chenla II task force strung out on Route 6 between its rear headquarters at Skoun and Kompong Thom town now consists of some 39 battalions. These forces performed well in their efforts to reopen the highway in September and October. They did not, however, encounter any significant enemy resistance in the process. So far they appear to have borne up well under the Communist pressure, and Cambodian commanders report that large numbers of Communist troops have been killed in abortive ground attacks. Government casualties now stand at about 35 killed and 400 wounded.

5. If Phnom Penh can keep the supplies and troops flowing up to Route 6 and beyond, and if it can draw on enough air support, then it should be able to stabilize the situation on Route 6. On the other hand, if the Communists maintain the pressure on government units north of Skoun while striking out in other directions at the same time, then the Cambodians may have to pull back to Skoun and hold the line there. There are, for example, unconfirmed reports that large numbers of Communists have begun to infiltrate the Route 6 area south of Skoun. If they follow last year's scenario, the Communists may also increase pressure on Route 7 between Skoun and Kompong Cham city. They might be able to undertake such an action with the forces already at their disposal east of Route 6 and north of Route 7.

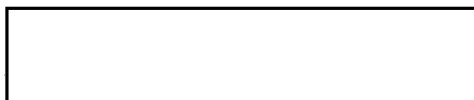


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6. There are several likely explanations for the current round of enemy attacks along Route 6. With better weather approaching, the Communists probably want to re-establish their control over the highway to facilitate the movement of supplies to their forces in areas west of the road. They probably also want to undermine Phnom Penh's morale by inflicting some sharp setbacks to what has been the Cambodians' best-run military operation of the war. It is also possible that the Communists are seeking to forestall whatever plans the government might be developing for operations in the direction of important enemy bases and supply points to the east of Route 6 or into Kompong Cham or Kratie Provinces.



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